
2014 regional summary report

The Caribbean

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INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of the key UNAIDS achievements in 2014 in the Caribbean region, grouped by the three strategic directions of the UNAIDS 2011–2015 strategy. It lists major challenges and key future interventions, and outlines the way the regional Joint Team operates. It can be read as a standalone report, although it is principally designed to complement other UNAIDS reporting at the country and global level.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Strategic direction 1: revolutionize HIV prevention

A strategy for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission was developed in the Caribbean in 2010, including the target of achieving elimination by 2015. Since 2010 there has been an increase in pregnant women testing for HIV, from 18% in 2010 to 74% at the end of 2014. The number of pregnant women living with HIV receiving antiretroviral medicines increased from 59% to 93% in the same period.

In 2014 a strong partnership between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Caribbean Regional Office, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the UNAIDS Secretariat resulted in meetings and documentation of progress towards validation of attainments of targets for the elimination of vertical transmission of HIV in the region. The provision of prevention services has led to a decline in the rate of mother-to-child transmission of HIV in the Caribbean from an estimated 18% in 2010 to an estimated 5% in 2014. All countries in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) have reached elimination goals, recording a mother-to-child transmission rate below 1%. In 2014 a meeting of all OECS members was held to assess progress made in elimination of mother-to-child transmission and to accelerate planning for the validation process, which started in Cuba in March 2015. Eight countries from the eastern Caribbean are undergoing the validation process in 2015, and another five countries, including Jamaica, will be considered for validation in 2016.

In further prevention efforts, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Caribbean office published a Spanish-language publication on concepts, approaches and competencies for comprehensive sexuality education. UNESCO also brokered and supported a mission to Jamaica from the education sectors in both Trinidad (Ministry of Education) and Tobago (Division of Education, Tobago House of Assembly).

UNAIDS conducted a youth dialogue "Bridging the gap" in Grenada for seven countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines). The dialogue aimed to strengthen advocacy for HIV and sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people. The UNAIDS Secretariat, in collaboration with UNESCO and UNICEF, additionally organized and

conducted a subregional consultation on advocacy for HIV and sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people. The consultation engaged youth advocates and youth-serving organizations, yielding youth-led advocacy action plans to engage key stakeholders in addressing the issues identified as barriers to sexual and reproductive health and rights services.

High-level officials from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the African Union (AU), including selected ministers of health from both regions, met in Geneva in May 2014 to explore the role of shared responsibility and the global solidarity agenda towards ending the AIDS epidemic in the Caribbean. The dialogue was convened by the UNAIDS Executive Director and examined the first steps in developing a Caribbean roadmap towards such shared responsibility. The meeting formally endorsed a CARICOM–AU–UNAIDS partnership to assist the development of the CARICOM roadmap.

Strategic direction 2: catalyse the next phase of treatment, care and support

The UNAIDS Secretariat Regional Support Team in the Caribbean hosted the HIV Care and Treatment Retargeting and Improving Access and Quality of HIV-Related Point of Care Testing in the Caribbean meeting in June 2014 in Port of Spain. Additionally, in collaboration with PAHO, the Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV and AIDS (PANCAP) and other partners, the first Latin American and Caribbean forum on the HIV continuum of care was held in Mexico City in May 2014, which endorsed the targets of 90% of people living with HIV knowing their HIV status, 90% of people who know their HIV status accessing treatment, and 90% of people on treatment having suppressed viral loads so they remain healthy (90–90–90 targets) by 2020.

OECS was supported by the Regional Support Team to develop a work plan for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund), and held the first regional coordination mechanism meeting, which helped to clarify priorities for country consultations on the concept note. OECS was also supported by the UNAIDS Secretariat to hold subregional investment case planning meetings, followed by country-specific investment case meetings in 2014, which contributed to the first draft of the OECS HIV Framework and Investment case. The Framework and Global Fund concept note mark the historic shift from a country response in the eastern Caribbean common market to a regional response towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

Twenty youth-serving organizations in Grenada were mobilized by UNAIDS in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNESCO to support a national sexual and reproductive health and HIV agenda through building peer leadership capacities. Baseline interviews were conducted for youth participation in decision-making in the Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

In follow-up to a research study on social protection in Jamaica, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported a training programme for adherence counsellors, contact investigators, psychologists and representatives of community-based

organizations working closely with people living with HIV. The goal was to facilitate a better understanding of the national social assistance programmes and how these programmes can benefit people living with HIV. An outcome of the training was greater collaboration between the staff at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Ministry of Local Government with staff from the Ministry of Health, to increase coverage of programming for people living with HIV.

The World Bank supported institutional development and capacity building by using its lending to increase the coverage of successful social protection interventions in several countries in the region (Antigua and Barbuda, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti and Jamaica). These projects included income-support programmes, skills development and employment training for poor people, conditional cash transfer programmes, and improving nutrition and health services.

Strategic direction 3: advance human rights and gender equality for the HIV response

The UNAIDS Secretariat supported the rollout of national survey data regarding sexual and reproductive health, discrimination and abuse. Media launches were held in Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago, and were scheduled for other countries throughout 2015. PANCAP has accepted that the polling methodology should become the standard for monitoring of this type in the region.

A publication exploring the challenges and legal stumbling blocks to overcoming HIV-related stigma and discrimination in the Caribbean was launched on 22 October 2014 in Trinidad and Tobago. The book includes contributions from a range of experts who participated in a high-level symposium convened by the UNAIDS Secretariat, PANCAP and the University of the West Indies in 2010. It highlights issues surrounding discriminatory laws and policies in the region and provides academics and policy-makers with options for removing laws that limit people's rights to health, freedom of movement and equal access to housing, education and work.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) helped the 51% Coalition—an alliance of women's organizations and individuals advocating for quotas for women in the Caribbean—to develop a strategy and programme document for empowering women as a political constituency. The strategy includes advocacy and monitoring of political parties' commitments to gender equality, including the needs of women living with HIV.

UNDP launched a regional initiative with Caribbean Vulnerable Communities and others to address violence against women and girls affected by HIV in health-care settings. UN Women similarly strengthened the capacity of the Caribbean Vulnerable Communities coalition on the provision of integrated HIV and gender-based violence prevention and response services.

Media campaigns on sexual and reproductive health rights for young people were

conducted by the UNAIDS regional support team in Barbados, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago. Public service announcements highlighting issues and rights for young people were developed for radio and television. Products for social media campaigns were also developed and are being used by youth organizations.

MAJOR CHALLENGES

- Unpredictability, flattening and potential decline of HIV external funding are important challenges for an increasing number of recently classified middle- and upper middle-income countries in the Caribbean. These countries express serious doubts about the feasibility of paying for the AIDS response from their domestic resources after the Global Fund and other bilateral and multilateral projects end their funding in 2015.
- The HIV pandemic in the Caribbean is fuelled by a range of social and economic inequalities and is sustained by high levels of stigma and discrimination against the most at-risk and marginalized populations. This drives the epidemic underground and makes it increasingly difficult to reach certain groups of people who may be deterred from seeking services, such as mothers living with HIV, which thus restricts efforts at elimination of mother-to-child transmission. Any association with HIV, such as testing or accessing treatment, is stigmatizing, especially in the smallest countries in the Caribbean. This has resulted in fewer people being tested, many not adhering to treatment guidelines and low disclosure of positive status.
- Progress in the HIV response has also been impeded in the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Jamaica, which carry 75% of the HIV burden in the region. People live below the poverty line due to political instability, migration, limited education and knowledge of HIV, and inequality of financial resources. Key populations include migrants, sex workers, transgender and men who have sex with men. There are also gaps in service delivery, particularly for key populations such as sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender people and migrants. This means that HIV services are still not available at every level of the health-care system in the region.
- Limited and declining resources for HIV have affected civil society engagement. For example, young people are generally not engaged by policy developers in decision-making. Additional support for youth organizations is needed for sustainable results, requiring coordination and collaboration with development partners.
- The attitudes and behaviours of highly influential religious groups are proving a major challenge in the region, prohibiting access to sexual education, limiting condom distribution, and rejecting or marginalizing certain sexual behaviours.

KEY FUTURE INTERVENTIONS

Key future interventions for the Caribbean region include the following:

- UNAIDS is committed to developing and supporting implementation of the 90–90–90 targets and finalizing a roadmap for the Caribbean region. Through the lead of PAHO, UNAIDS will support the review of laboratory systems in the region and treatment retargeting in collaboration with the Caribbean Public Health Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Regional Support Team will strongly advocate for and facilitate at least nine countries in the region to be validated for eliminating vertical transmission, especially on the human rights component.
- Planning is under way for initiatives to further strengthen school counsellors and youth workers with competencies for delivering life skills-based comprehensive sexuality education through the development of targeted resources and capacity-building workshops. This work will provide a deeper focus that can be applied not only in formal school instruction via health and family life education but also in non-formal learning spaces in order to reach a larger cohort of young people. UNESCO and UNFPA will continue their cooperation in this area of work.
- Support will be provided to youth organizations and national partners to tailor draft advocacy messages for sexual and reproductive health and HIV to country realities. The Regional Initiative on Sexual and Reproductive Health has been endorsed by CARICOM through UNFPA. The UNAIDS Secretariat is using this framework to ensure commitments made by heads of government are implemented in countries.
- Youth dialogues are planned in Haiti and Jamaica to ensure the work of youth organizations feeds into national development agendas.
- UNDP will launch price, patent status and registration status in selected countries in the Caribbean region to strengthen regional cooperation, policy coherence and multisectoral action to improve treatment and retention.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank will continue to expand a national social protection floor for each country in the Caribbean in a way that is sensitive to HIV and captures vulnerable people living with HIV. UNDP will identify strategic engagement options on social protection for HIV in the region.
- Dialogue will continue with national authorities and technical assistance will continue to be provided to promote the integration of HIV and elimination of mother-to-child transmission within broader maternal, new-born and child health approaches.

THE UNAIDS REGIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM

The Regional Support Team helps to coordinate UN organizations working on AIDS through the United Nations Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office. Coordination also takes place with PANCAP and with representatives of strategic partners such as the United States Agency for International Development, the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the Global Fund, civil society organizations, the University of the West Indies, scientists and academics. UNAIDS is represented on the PANCAP coordinating committee, the PANCAP board and the Regional Coordination Mechanism. UNAIDS is also represented on the United Nations Regional Team in Barbados and the OECS, engaging the ministers of health and the OECS Director-General in the subregional response.

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